



A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

IN Bagdad, in the little lane by the Golden Bridge, lived, ages ago, a merchant named Kalif. He was a quiet, retiring man, who sat early and late in his little shop, and went but once a year to Mosul or Shiraz, where he bought embroidered robes in exchange for otto of roses.

On one of these journeys, chancing to have fallen a little in the rear of his caravan, he heard roarings and trampling of horses' hoofs in the thicket close by the roadside. Drawing his sword, which he wore on account of thieves, he entered the thicket. On a little green, surrounded by trees, he saw a horseman in a light blue mantle and a turban, fastened by a flashing diamond. The horse, an Arab of purest blood, seemed to have lost its senses. Rearing upright with a piercing neigh, it struggled vainly to dislodge an enormous panther which had fixed its great claws in the horse's flanks. The rider had lost all control over it; blood and foam poured from its mouth and nostrils. Kalif sprang boldly out, and with a mighty stroke split the panther's skull, and flinging away his sword, ran to the horse's head,

thereby enabling the rider to dismount. Having calmed the trembling animal, the horseman begged his rescuer to follow him.

"I had lost my way in the chase," he said, "and should have fallen a victim to the panther if Allah had not sent you to my aid. I will reward you well for your bravery. Come! let us seek my companions; there, behind that wood, my camp must be."

"I did what any other would have done in my place," answered Kalif, simply, "and expect no reward. But, if you so will it, I will accompany you to your tents."

The stranger took his horse by the rein and walked in silence at the merchant's side till they arrived at an opening in the trees. Here, surrounded by several smaller ones, stood one large tent of purple linen. A number of richly clad men threw themselves on their faces before the new comer. Then Kalif knew whom he had saved: it was the Shah himself! He was about to fall at his feet, but the Shah seized his hand and led him into the tent. Inside, standing on five stools, were five caskets, the first of gold set with jewels, the second of gold alone, the third silver, the fourth copper, and the fifth of iron.

"Choose one of these caskets," said the Shah.

Kalif hesitated. At length he said :—

"What I did is not worthy of any reward, but if you will it, oh! King of Kings, I will take one of these caskets to remind me of the day when my eyes were permitted to behold the Light of Asia."

He stooped and took the iron casket.

The Shah started. "Stranger," he said, "your modesty has met with its own reward. You have chosen the most valuable casket, for, look! the others are empty; but this one contains two jewels which possess the magic gift of bestowing undreamed-of power to their owner." He raised the lid and showed the wondering Kalif the two stones. "This one," he said, "is a lapis lazuli. Who-soever winds it in the folds of his turban, to him every-thing is known that has hap-pened since the world began, and no secret can be hidden from him. But this stone," and he took a dia-mond the size of a dove's egg from the casket, "this stone brings all the riches he can think of to its owner. He has but to rub the stone and repeat his wish aloud." He replaced the stones in the casket, closed the lid, and handed it to the merchant, who thanked the Shah, hid the treasure in his robes, and hastened to rejoin his caravan.

Once more in his own house he often looked at the princely gift, and one day as he was rubbing the lid he noticed an inscription upon it that had hitherto been unseen. It ran :—

'Tis Allah's will that to him who cherishes
The precious gift that never perishes,
The East shall erstwhile all bow down,
So far the date on palm is grown.

He never spoke of his adventure in the Kalaat Mountains, neither could he ever make up his mind to test the virtue of the stones, being a frugal man on the one hand, and unwilling to surpass his neighbours in wisdom on the other. But at length the news of the Shah's rescue by the merchant reached even Bagdad, together with the account of the Royal reward, and people jostled one another to call on the merchant and see with their own eyes the wonderful casket. In consequence Kalif had more customers in one day than he generally had in ten years, and his daily receipts testified to the worth of the casket. For many years he enjoyed the reward of his bravery, and at his death Ali Haitam, the eldest son, proposed that they should draw lots for the magic stones. He



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had great ideas of his own cleverness, and hoped from the bottom of his heart to win the lapis lazuli. Ali Hassuf, the second son, whose sole failing was insatiable greed, was quite agreeable. (In secret he was revolving in his own mind how to obtain the diamond in case it fell into the hands of the youngest son.) But just as they were about to draw, Abdul Kassim, the youngest son, said : "Dear brothers, we are three, and there

are but two stones. It would be better, therefore, for one to renounce his claim in order that no dispute may arise in our hitherto peace-loving family. I am the youngest, and therefore can have least claim on the stones. Throw to decide which stone shall fall to each. I resign!"

The other two were delighted, and as it happened each got the stone he desired.

"But in order that I may have a keep-sake of my dear father," continued Abdul Kassim, "permit me to take home the casket. It will be of no use to you since you have divided the contents."

Ali Hassuf hesitated at first, but finally agreed to Kassim's wish.

The three brothers left the empty house, and went each to seek his fortune in his own way.

Ali Haitam bought a piece of muslin, folded it into a turban, sewed the lapis lazuli inside, and fixed it firmly on his head. Then he went to the bazaar and waited for an influx of wisdom. And see! The power of the stone set to work and his mind was filled with knowledge! He knew the origin of all things, and his eyes could see through walls five feet thick! He passed the Caliph's palace, and he could see that in the recesses of the cellars were hidden 9,000 sacks of gold, and that

Fatma, the daughter of the Caliph, was the most lovely maiden in the East; and an idea occurred to him that dazzled him. "How would it be," he thought, "if I placed my wisdom at the Caliph's disposal, became his first adviser, and finally married the lovely Fatma?" But together with this dream came the longing to display to an admiring crowd some proofs of his wisdom.

He hurried back to the bazaar, mounted the highest steps at the gates, and cried: "You people of Bagdad, who believe that the sun moves round the earth, you are ignorant fools and sons of fools! Hear now what I preach to you. The sun stands still, but the earth moves!"

He intended to continue, but the cries of the bystanders interrupted him.

"Ali Haitam has gone mad," they cried; "listen to the nonsense he is talking. Come, let us hold him head first under the lion's mouth at the spring; that will restore him to reason!"

And one, a fruit dealer, took an orange, and crying, "Ali Haitam is right, the sun moves just as little as this orange!" flung the orange at the philosopher on the steps. The juicy fruit knocked the turban



"THE JUICY FRUIT KNOCKED THE TURBAN FROM ALI'S HEAD."

from Ali's head. He stooped to regain it, but in vain. The fruit dealer's throw was the signal for a general onslaught, so that he was obliged to take to his heels and fly for home. Dirty and panting he reached his hut, deeply grieved at the loss of his precious stone, and furious at the stupidity of the people who showed so little understanding of the first principles of science.

The second brother started more cautiously. Since he had but seldom been further than the end of the narrow street, by the Golden Bridge, he was not in a position to think of anything very precious to wish for; he therefore first visited the bazaar and asked the price of everything he saw. At last he found something that, on account of its high price, made a great impression on him. It was a Turkish sword that a cunning jeweller had studded thickly with diamonds on handle and sheath. The dealer asked 1,500 golden coins for it, and the bystanders stared with open eyes at the man who dared to bargain for such costly possessions. Just as Ali Hassuf was weighing the precious sword in his hand, a palanquin was borne through the crowd. He turned, and through the drawn curtains caught sight of a maiden of wondrous beauty. When he heard that she was the Caliph's daughter, the desire awoke in his soul to marry this lovely creature, and it seemed to him not unlikely that the Caliph would give his daughter to a man of such note as he would become as the possessor of the magic diamond. He decided to buy the sword, and, armed with the same, to visit the Caliph the very next day.

"I shall come again the very first thing to-morrow morning," he said to the dealer. "I have not quite enough money with me now, but I shall procure it this evening. I had quite expected," he added, boasting, "that the sword would be expensive."

He turned and went home, where he saddled the thin ass and hung across its back two large panniers. When it grew dark he softly drove the beast through the yard and led it out into the desert. For about an hour he walked, and in imagi-

nation saw himself in possession of all the glories the talisman would bring him. He never noticed that he was followed by three dark forms, who had never lost sight of him since his visit to the bazaar. He halted by a group of stunted palms, spread out a large cloth, and with trembling fingers began to rub the diamond, crying at the same time: "Spirit of the Stone! send me at once twenty shekels of

golden coins!" He waited a moment, and listened into the darkness, thinking he heard whispering voices. But as all was silent he repeated his wish for the second and third time. He heard a noise as of the falling of soft, heavy weights, and, on stooping, found twenty well-filled sacks. He opened one, and felt inside. And, truly! it was really gold in bright new coins! With feverish haste he slung the sacks on the ass's back, and turned its head homewards. Suddenly he heard once more the same mysterious whisperings, this time in his immediate neighbourhood. He stood still and listened with bated breath. He felt himself seized by heavy hands and thrown to the ground, and saw another form seize the ass. Two men with blackened



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faces tore off his turban and robe and left him lying half naked by the roadside, after having warned him to keep quiet as to this attack unless he wished to lose his life. Trembling with fright and rage, he saw the robbers disappear with his ass in the direction of the mountains. What pained him most was the loss of his diamond, which he had concealed in his robe. He reached home, where he lay hidden for weeks, too ashamed to show himself in the streets or at the bazaar. But once as he sat

on the Golden Bridge fishing, to try and provide himself with a frugal meal, the weapon dealer passed him by, and said: "Well, Ali Hassuf, when are you coming for your sword?"

But sword and Princess were for ever lost to Ali Hassuf.

In the meantime, as the two elder brothers sat mourning their losses, Abdul Kassim, the youngest, sat at home in his little house by the gardens, thinking with regret of his father, and wondering what he should do to earn himself his daily bread. Before him, on a little stool, stood the iron casket. There came a knock at the door, and Micha ben Jahzeel, the Jew, who had lent him money a month or two ago, walked in. Micha looked grave and said: "Abdul Kassim, times are bad, and ready money gets scarcer and scarcer. You know I lent you ten golden coins, and I have come to ask"—his eyes fell on the casket and he started, but collecting himself, went on: "I have come to tell you that I am not in an immediate hurry for the return of the loan. If you like you can keep it, or as it is hardly worth mentioning, keep it for some months, or even years if you like. I only wanted to tell you you needn't trouble about it, there is no hurry at all." He bowed low to his debtor and withdrew.

Abdul Kassim marvelled at the change in the Jew's manner, but as he thought of the looks he had cast at the casket he couldn't help smiling.

On the same evening came his neighbour, the clothes dealer, who had not visited him for years. "Dear friend," he said, and placed a bundle on the floor before Kassim, "I have come to entreat your pardon that my horse should have splashed your robe with mud the other day; he is a young thing, and is not yet properly broken. I have brought you a new robe to replace it, which I hope will please you." Then he withdrew. The young man could not recollect having been splashed by his neighbour's horse, still less could he account for the generosity of one who was celebrated for his meanness in presenting him with such an elaborately embroidered robe.

Next morning, just as he had put on his new robe, a distant relation arrived, bringing a magnificently caparisoned horse.

"Dear cousin," he said—formerly he had not even noticed him—"your appearance grieves me. I feared you were giving way too much to grief at the loss of your father, and it would give me great pleasure to cheer you a little. I have ventured to bring you

this horse, which is overcrowding my stable; do me the favour to accept this little gift!"

Abdul Kassim would have refused, but the cousin had hurried away. There he stood holding the beautiful animal by the bridle. He could not resist the temptation to mount him. He swung himself into the saddle and rode into the town. Everyone bowed to him, and many stood still, saying: "There, I told you so! Abdul Kassim was always the favourite son, and he has inherited the casket!"

Next morning, as the barber sharpened his razor and began to shave the Caliph, the latter asked him: "Well, Harnos, what are my subjects talking about just now?"

The barber bowed to the ground and said: "What should they speak of, oh, King of the Faithful, if not of your goodness and wisdom?"

"Of your idiotcy, son of a she ass," shouted the Caliph, bored by the eternal flatteries of the barber. "Tell me, what are the people talking about?"

"They talk," began Harnos, hesitatingly; "they talk of the luck of your servant, Abdul Kassim, whom they call the wisest and richest of your subjects."

"Abdul Kassim? I don't even know his name," said the Caliph.

"He is the son and heir of Kalif," continued the barber, more courageously, "the same Kalif whom the Shah once rewarded with a magic casket."

He related at length all about the magic stones. The Caliph listened attentively, dismissed the barber, and sent a message to the Grand Vizier to come at once. The Vizier came and confirmed the barber's tale. "Abdul Kassim," he said, "knows everything that goes on in the world, and whenever he has a wish, all he has to do to fulfil it is to rub the diamond and say what he wants."

The Caliph grew serious. "Do you think, Vizier, that this man could usurp my throne? How would it be if I gave him a palace and raised him to be the husband of my daughter?"

The Grand Vizier agreed to the proposal of his ruler, and undertook himself to convey to the astounded Abdul Kassim the tidings that the Commander of the Faithful had given him a palace and awaited his visit.

The same evening the new favourite of the Caliph packed all his few belongings on the horse's back, took the iron casket under his arm and, amid the cheers of the crowd, entered the palace.

A troop of negroes received him and threw



"'SON OF A SHE ASS,' SHOUTED THE CALIPH."

themselves at his feet. An especially gorgeously arrayed slave led him into a room, where a banquet awaited him. Abdul Kassim had never fared so well in his life. But he did not forget to praise Allah for his goodness. Next morning he put on his gorgeous robe, bound on the magnificent sword he found in the great hall, and rode, accompanied by the negroes, to visit the Caliph.

The Commander of the Faithful sat on the throne and awaited his subject, who, when he appeared, was about to throw himself in the dust at the ruler's feet, but the Caliph descended the three steps of the throne, and took the young man's hand.

"Are you Abdul Kassim," he said, "son of Kalif, the merchant who lived by the Golden Bridge?"

"I am he, Caliph," answered Abdul;

"permit me to express my thanks for the palace with which you have endowed your most humble servant."

"I have heard much good of you," said the Caliph, when he had ordered his suite to retire; "and pray you to show me the magic jewels that help you to such power and wisdom."

"Of which jewels are you speaking?" asked Abdul Kassim, amazed.

"Well," smiled the Caliph, "which jewels should I mean but those you have inherited from your father?"

The young man stared. So the Caliph, too, took him for the possessor of the magic stones? Without reserve he confessed that, to avoid disputes, he had voluntarily retired and left the stones to his brothers.

"But," said the Caliph, "Micha ben Jahzeel, the Jew, saw the casket in your house!"

"The casket he may have seen," answered Abdul Kassim; "I begged it of my brothers in memory of my father."

The Caliph seemed still in doubt. He

sent a slave to Abdul Kassim's palace to bring the casket. The messenger brought it, gave it to the Caliph, and retired. The Caliph opened the lid and looked inside. It was in truth empty! His gaze fell on the inscription:—

'Tis Allah's will that to him who cherishes
The precious gift that never perishes,
The East shall erstwhile all bow down,
So far the date on palm is grown.

He read the verse and looked at the youth. "Abdul Kassim," he said, "you have jewels in your heart more precious than all the treasures of the earth. For love of your brothers you gave up the stones, and for love of your father you have preserved this seemingly worthless casket. But Allah has blessed you for your virtues and has, by means of this humble iron casket, raised you to power and wealth. I dare not refuse

to assist you. I will give you the most priceless gift at my disposal—the hand of my only daughter.”

He called the chief overseer of the harem and bade him lead Fatma to the throne-room. The maiden had passed the night in weeping, for she had heard that she was to be given in marriage to a strange man. She shuddered at the thought, for as only child of the Caliph she had been thoroughly spoiled, and hated the idea of leaving her father's roof.

Abdul Kassim, who until now had been struck utterly dumb with astonishment, could not refrain from a cry of admiration at the sight of the lovely Fatma. She seemed to him a hundred times more beautiful than any description he had heard of her in Bagdad.

In the midst of her grief Fatma retained her woman's curiosity, and on hearing the youth's voice, cast one glance at him over her father's shoulder. The first impression seemed not unfavourable. She eyed his slender form as he stood leaning on his sword, and gradually ceased her sobbing. She even raised herself and took hold of the Caliph's arm. "Father," she said, "do with me what you will; not without cause do the people call you 'The Wise One.'"

So Fatma was married to Abdul. But neither she nor any other ever knew that the iron casket connected with her young lord's rise and power was empty. The Caliph

advised his son-in-law to maintain the deepest silence as to the absence of the magic jewels.

In the fifth year of their wedded life the Caliph, feeling the weight of advancing years, abdicated in Abdul Kassim's favour, so the verse on the casket lid was fulfilled, and



"FATHER," SHE SAID, "DO WITH ME WHAT YOU WILL."

Abdul Kassim reigned many, many years over Bagdad, the best and wisest ruler who had ever ascended the throne. Allah's name be praised!